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## Most comments to DNR show support for raising water on Lake Koshkonong



Comments Print

JAKE MAGEE  
October 31, 2015



ANTHONY WAHL

Lakeside homeowners Jim and Dana Dietmeyer point out how low Lake Koshkonong is around the pier behind their home in Fort Atkinson. The couple are among a number of people along the lake who express favor to raising the lake's level 7.2

FORT ATKINSON—Before Jim Dietmeyer's family can board their pontoon boat for a cruise around Lake Koshkonong, he often has to jump into the water and push the boat off its lift at the end of their 108-foot pier.

In July and August, the lake is so low the weight of

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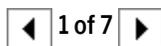
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inches in the summer months.



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The Dietmeyers and many other lakefront property owners would love to see more water in the lake. Those without such long piers must wade out to their lifts, sometimes more than 100 feet from the shore, Jim said.

passengers prevents the boat from floating off the lift.

The lake's bottom slopes gradually from shore to a maximum depth of about 7 feet. Water levels are controlled by the Indianford Dam.

The Rock-Koshkonong Lake District wants the water raised 7.2 inches during traditional times of low water to make it easier for boaters to access water and lakefront businesses.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is opposed, saying raising the water could damage wetlands and harm wildlife.

The disagreement spawned a decade-long legal feud between the lake district and the DNR. The case wound its way to The Wisconsin Supreme Court in the summer of 2013. In February 2014, the Rock County Circuit Court, consistent with the Supreme Court's July 2013 ruling, ordered the DNR to consider the economic impacts of raising the water levels, not just the impacts on habitat and wildlife. The DNR was ordered to collect and consider comments from lakefront property owners about the impacts of a higher water level.

Between Feb. 16, 2015, and a soft deadline of March 13, the DNR received about 400 comments. About 76 percent favor raising the lake 7.2 inches in the summer, and about 24 percent are opposed.

Three-quarters of those in favor of more water listed boating and/or the economic impact that would result from higher water levels as their reasons. Many claim boating is difficult or even dangerous when water levels are low.

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Once in the water, the Dietmeyers still must be careful. The water is shallow enough that sticks and rocks are hazards. The Dietmeyers' neighbors recently hit something in the water, causing about \$1,500 worth of damage to their pontoon boat, Jim said.

With shallow water, it's difficult to boat to lakefront businesses, such as the Buckhorn Supper Club. Instead, the Dietmeyers bring their boat in and drive to restaurants and businesses they want to patronize. Being able to boat to and dock at lakefront businesses would be great, Jim said.

Despite these troubles, the Dietmeyers don't regret their decision to purchase their lakefront property in Fort Atkinson two years ago. They drive 90 minutes to the lake from their Illinois home about 45 weekends a year.

“The lake is huge, and it's beautiful,” Jim said. “Beautiful sunsets year round.”

Their property hasn't decreased in value, but Jim said you never know; if the water isn't raised, they might be looking to sell in the not-too-distant future.

“We're thinking if they raise it 6 inches in July and August, that'd be huge,” Jim said.

“We need three adults at all times on the boat—one to drive, a second to watch the kids on the tube and a third to watch for rocks/sticks/floating objects on the lake,” Jim's wife, Dana Dietmeyer, wrote in her letter to the DNR.

Several wrote they've damaged their boat propellers on rocks in shallow water.

Steven Lehmann has owned his lakefront property in Fort Atkinson for 10 years. He has a 200-foot pier. In late summer, the water at the end of his pier drops to about 15 inches—just enough to launch a pontoon boat.

Lehmann said raising the lake even 4 inches could eliminate 100 feet of his pier, he said.

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“We'd have to only put in half of our pier. It'd be a lot less work,” he said.

Doug Elwell and Eva Powers, who own lakefront property in Edgerton, left Lake Koshkonong for Lake Mendota in Madison in 2013 and 2014 as the Koshkonong became “unusable.” They went there again this summer, they wrote.

“So, as a direct result of the increasing shallowness of the lake, we no longer patronize Whispering Pines Marina or Harbor Recreation or the Rock River Marina for mooring, supplies and parts. Those dollars will be spent in Madison, now,” they wrote. “Unfortunately, we have moments of regret that we bought the lake house we love since our ability to utilize the lake to its fullest seems to be diminishing with each succeeding year.”

Gary and Barb Vorpahl have seen firsthand people choose to recreate elsewhere. The condo owners in the Vorpahls' Fort Atkinson complex have moved their boats to other lakes. Several condos are on sale, and property values are decreasing, they wrote to the DNR.

Others said they wouldn't have retired to or bought a home on Lake Koshkonong had they known the summer water levels would be so low.

Jenny Wedvick of Stark Company Realtors noted tourism and property values are taking a hit from low lake levels. Because of Koshkonong's proximity to large cities to the south, buyers would come to Koshkonong instead of Madison lakes if Koshkonong were more navigable, she wrote.

A report by Russ Kashian and Matthew Winden of UW-Whitewater submitted to the DNR by the lake district claims lake property values have increased over the past 16 years but at a slower rate than similar Wisconsin lakes.

“Therefore, there is reason to believe that this change in demand for lake frontage on Lake Koshkonong is related to the lowering of the water levels from the Indianford Dam modifications,” the report reads.

Lake Koshkonong lost \$116,000 in yearly tax revenues compared to Lake Sinissippi and \$550,000 compared to Big Muskego Lake because of water level reductions, the report states.

Both the Edgerton and Milton area chambers of commerce have noticed these trends and wrote to the DNR in support of raising the water levels.

### **KEEP IT DOWN**

Not everyone is in favor of raising water levels—especially those with low-lying property. The biggest reason people listed for opposition to raising the water was flooding. Just as many were concerned with preventing shoreline erosion and protecting area wetlands and wildlife.

Justin Shultz of Milton wrote Lake Koshkonong has always been shallow and muddy, and businesses and people chose to build and live on it anyway.

“Raising the water level by a few inches will never make this lake like Lake Geneva, deep and blue, but will only increase erosion, risk of flooding and the costs to landowners to prevent these two problems, and it will decrease the native beauty of the place I call home,” he wrote.

Penelope Shackelford, secretary-treasurer of the Lake Koshkonong Wetland Association, claimed property values around the lake are rising because people value the beauty and recreation activities the lake provides. Raising water levels would damage wetlands and have a negative impact on fish, birds and turtles. Flooding leaves wetland soil in a poor state for re-vegetation, she wrote.

Gary Bachunas of Edgerton said raising the water could actually reduce property values because they'd flood more. He called the idea of stimulating tourism by raising the lake's levels “an illusion.”

A few residents claimed flooding has nothing to do with what level the lake's water is set at but is a product of Mother Nature and mostly out of the DNR's hands.

“When Lake Koshkonong floods, it does not correlate to the operating orders of the Indianford dam,” wrote Sue Tronnes of Edgerton. “It happens in the spring when the gates are open anyways. It's simply a lot of water needing to go through a narrow river, and we will have flooding no matter what the orders are during the summer.”

Most businesses that wrote to the DNR were in favor of raising the lake's level to encourage more tourism in the area. That's not the case for Steven Cline, owner of the 569-unit condominium camp resort Jellystone Park in Fort Atkinson.

Raising water levels would “compromise the quality of resources” that the business's clientele enjoy, including wildlife. If those resources disappear, the park's users will go elsewhere, he wrote.

Some opposed to raising water levels called the validity of the lake district's study into question.

## **NO END IN SIGHT**

The DNR must consider public input before making its final decision.

No decision seems to be on the horizon. The DNR originally hoped to have a draft by fall, but it's still evaluating information related to the water level order and doesn't have a timetable for a decision, said Steven Ales, DNR water programs supervisor.

Some comments urged the department to make a final decision one way or the other to put the longstanding issue to rest.

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 Hey BuyUSA -

No One is talking about making Koshkonong deeper - it is about holding back water levels - stabilizing - when low water & droughts occur, which traditionally occur during the summer boating recreational season (June / July / August). Visit the lake in March and April, when snow melt and Spring rain raises the lake level significantly (high water / flood), you will see ALL gates WIDE open - the concrete spillway is not even a speed bump for water discharge. And don't pretend you know anything about "flood storage," even your friends at DNR have conceded the watershed is too vast for Koshkonong to serve as flood storage.

By Long\_Time\_Gone at 8:28 am Sunday, November 1, 2015 | [Report Abuse](#)

 Gee, 40 years ago the lake was shallow too. When was it deep?

Maybe.....NEVER. Either pay to have the lake dredged or move to a deep lake. Why do you think property is cheaper at Lake Koshkonong?

By buyusa at 2:47 pm Saturday, October 31, 2015 | [Report Abuse](#)

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